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DE RUEHLB #0836/01 1561514
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 041514Z JUN 08
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2165
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2458
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 2753
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000836

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/02/2018

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SUBJECT: LEBANON: GEMAYEL PROPOSES TO S/P GORDON HOW U.S.
CAN UNITE MARCH 14

REF: BEIRUT 733

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) Former President and Kataeb (Phalange) leader Amine Gemayel proposed to visiting Policy Planning Director David Gordon tangible ways through which the U.S. could strengthen March 14 moderates, including visible support in the form of public visits, training for young leaders, and conflict resolution workshops. Asserting that the Christians contribute to Lebanon's "raison d'etre," Gemayel said that President Michel Sleiman can reinvigorate the strength of the Christians, which in turn would bolster the presidency. Gemayel believes the opposition-allied Armenian Tashnaq party can be persuaded to support Sleiman and March 14. End summary.

2. (C) In a June 3 visit to Lebanon, Policy Planning Director David Gordon, Todd Deatherage and Whitley Wolman of S/P, accompanied by the Charge, Special Assistant, and PolOff, met with former President and Kataeb (Phalange) leader Amine Gemayel and party member Toufi Wahabib at his party headquarters in Saifi.

EMPOWERING KATAEB'S YOUTH

3. (C) Gemayel recounted his party's nearly 75 year-old history, saying that Kataeb has encountered multiple moments where it had to choose between "suicide" or "surrender." Today, his party is at another such juncture, and he is choosing instead to empower the next generation of leaders, guided by the theme of "change," in order to breathe new life into Kataeb. (Note: Young members of Kataeb, including Amine's son Samy, are some of the most involved participants in the International Republican Institute's USG-funded strategic communications workshop. End note.)

4. (C) Gordon responded that he is in Beirut to discuss how the U.S. can have a sustained approach to empowering moderate voices in Lebanon, and that a focus on developing the next generation is critical.

CHRISTIANS ESSENTIAL TO
LEBANON'S RAISON D'ETRE

15. (C) "How you focus on Lebanon depends on what kind of Lebanon you want. If it is a Muslim state, then Lebanon would lose its 'raison d'etre,'" Gemayel asserted. The Christian presence is necessary to Lebanon's identity, he continued, but it is a fragile presence requiring support. He noted that the IRI work is a "good first step for broader cooperation because it gives Kataeb members the opportunity to choose with whom they wish to partner."

16. (C) Gordon responded that the U.S. envisions the creation of a "national Lebanese identity which embraces and captures all confessional communities' ideals." He noted the importance of the Christian role in Lebanon, adding that the Doha agreement (reftel) recognizes this and "creates a political opportunity to shift the balance within the Christian community to a more favorable one (i.e. away from the pro-Hizballah opposition)." The Charge noted that Hizballah, which tried to present itself as a national party, had lost its legitimacy as such after the May clashes in which its followers launched attacks against fellow Lebanese citizens.

17. (C) Gemayel suggested the U.S. establish a closer, more visible relationship with the Christians in Lebanon to balance the relationships other states (Saudi Arabia, Iran) have with Lebanon's Sunnis and Shias. He said public visits were one way to make this relationship visible. Gordon affirmed U.S. support for the March 14 movement, saying, "We are looking to build a big tent and expand the March 14 support base to include more Christians."

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SLEIMAN CAN PRESERVE
THE CHRISTIANS' ROLE

18. (C) Newly-elected President Michel Sleiman, a Maronite Christian, offers an enormous opportunity to preserve Lebanon's "raison d'etre" if he can secure a strong Christian backing, Gemayel said. Traditionally, Lebanese presidents have enjoyed the backing of a strong Christian party, Gemayel explained, and therefore the Christian leadership needed to be "reinvigorated" in order strengthen Sleiman. The Christians and the President derive their strength from each other, he concluded.

U.S. CAN PROVIDE
OPERATIONAL ASSISTANCE

19. (C) Gemayel also proposed pursuing "operational cooperation" with U.S., which would include an exchange of information on political parties, training for young leaders, and conflict resolution workshops aimed at bringing Christians together. He said that Christian opposition leader and head of the Free Patriotic Movement Michel Aoun is taking advantage of the imbalance within March 14 between the Christians and the Future Movement Sunnis. He added that the U.S. gives "too much credit" to Sunni Future Party leader Saad Hariri, which Gemayel says Aoun exploits to his Christian supporters. (Note: Hariri is nominally Gemayal's ally in March 14. End note.)

WOONG THE TASHNAQ

110. (C) Gemayel agreed that the opposition-allied Armenian Tashnaq party could provide March 14 with the support it needs. He suggested Sleiman could play an important role in courting the Tashnaq, explaining that traditionally, the party is close to the President. MP Michel Murr, who has recently broken his alliance with the opposition to assume an independent status, may also be able to sway Tashnaq, Gemayel posited.

¶11. (C) For his own part, Gemayel believes that Kataeb could encourage the Future Movement to offer concessions to the Tashnaq. Gemayel wondered if the Armenian community in Los Angeles could influence the Tashnaq. He noted that the Armenian government, since gaining independence, has been close to Iran and influential in Lebanon.

¶12. (C) Gemayel reported that MP Elie Skaff, a member of Aoun's Change and Reform parliamentary bloc, does not in actuality control the five MPs nominally in his group. One is loyal to Aoun, one to Hizballah, and one to Future, he explained. Gemayel added that Skaff, who comes from a prominent land-owning family, recently sold a village to Iran for millions of dollars.

¶13. (U) S/P Director Gordon did not have an opportunity to clear this message before his departure from Beirut.
SISON